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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether a teacher's reading to sixth grade students on a regular basis would have a significant positive effect on their reading comprehension. Twenty students, divided into experimental and control groups, were pretested and posttested using the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test." During the eight-week study, the researcher read to the experimental group for 25 minutes, three times a week. During the reading, the control group worked on other activities in a separate room. The posttest results indicated a significant difference in the comprehension scores for the two groups with the experimental group showing significant gains in comprehension as a result of the treatment. (HTH)

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READING TO CHILDREN AND ACHIEVEMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

Listening plays an integral role in learning to read. Because of the close connection between these receptive aspects of language, this study was designed to determine whether a teacher's oral reading to sixth grade students on a regular basis would have a significant positive effect on their comprehension.

The population of this study was comprised of twenty sixth graders from an upper middle class school. The students were divided into two stratified random samples, one of which served as the experimental group, while the other served as the control. Both groups were given standardized pretests and posttests in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the treatment.

The study spanned eight weeks. For twenty-five minutes three times a week the experimental group was read to by the researcher. At the same time the control group worked on other reading activities while being monitored by a volunteer in a separate room.

The results of this study indicated a significant difference between the comprehension scores of the experimental and control groups. The experimental group showed a significant gain in comprehension as a result of the treatment.

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Introduction

Reading and listening are closely related; they are both receptive aspects of language unlike writing and speaking which are expressive aspects. Clearly, the acquisition of listening skills is essential in learning to read because associations between the sound of a word, its meaning, and form must be established. Perhaps because teachers of the primary grades realize the close connection between reading and listening, they often make reading aloud to their classes part of their daily routine. By reading to students, teachers are not only helping to foster the positive attitude that reading is an enjoyable activity that adults engage in and share with others, but they are also exposing children to a vocabulary of a higher level than they could decode for themselves and are providing them with numerous opportunities for vicarious experiences. On the primary level, Gatheral (1981) states that children who are read to in the home are more interested in reading when they get to school. According to this writer, not only do such children do better in vocabulary activities but also anticipate events in stories better than children who have not been read to. She suggests reading to children in small intervals as often as six to eight times a day. Chan (1974) admonishes both parents and teachers not to stop reading aloud to children when they begin reading for themselves. Since a taste for good books is acquired, adults should continue to cultivate this taste by reading aloud to children. Lauritzen (1980)

points out that children's literature abounds in stories in the oral tradition which have been designed for repeated oral readings. According to this writer, not only are stories with oral literary patterns suitable for kindergarten and first grade students who are making the transition from listeners to readers, but they are also vehicles for stimulating creativity and skill instruction for students in the upper grades.

However as children begin to read for themselves, they are often read to less and less. By the intermediate grades reading aloud to students often becomes a luxury. Willems (1978) observes that the practice of reading orally to children often ends entirely by the time they reach fourth grade. She feels that part of the reason is that reading to older children is more difficult because the books are more advanced and need to be chosen more carefully. She stresses the point that books to be read aloud need not be great or classic literature but merely books that will expand students' interests and inspire them to read on their own. She offers a bibliography of titles suitable for reading aloud.

On the secondary level, Chadwick (1982) states that one of the foremost goals of reading aloud to students is exposure to good literature like the works of James Joyce, Dylan Thomas, and E. A. Poe. He feels that the teacher's oral reading of timeless literature will help students learn how language works and how writers develop thoughts.

Williams (1982) agrees that reading aloud is often neglected on the junior high and high school levels and suggests that a mere ten minutes per day spent on this activity can positively change attitudes toward reading and improve reading and listening skills.

Surely, it would appear, reading aloud can have positive effects on reading on all levels. Accordingly, Hillman (1975) discusses five major reasons for reading aloud to students of all ages. She states that reading aloud (1) allows the modeling of language patterns, (2) allows an identification with models, (3) provides a commonality of experience to listeners from diverse backgrounds, (4) promotes listening reading comprehension skills, and (5) motivates students to want to read (p. 1).

Problem

Although much comment appears in the foregoing, little research is provided to justify such practices. To provide such evidence the researcher will attempt to determine whether a teacher's reading orally to sixth grade students on a regular basis will have a significant positive effect on their comprehension.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that there will be no significant difference in the comprehension scores of a sample of sixth grade children who are exposed to a teacher's oral reading on a regular basis as compared to a similar sample who are not exposed to a teacher's oral reading.

Definitions

Oral reading is defined as the teacher reading aloud to students.

Assumptions

It is assumed that the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test is a valid tool for measuring comprehension.

Limitations

Since there is only one sixth grade in the researcher's school and since the proposed project involves the comparison of an experimental with a control group, the services of a

volunteer (a retired fourth grade teacher) to monitor the control group are required.

The amount of time agreed to by the administration and the volunteer monitoring the control group is restricted to twenty-five minutes three times a week for eight weeks.

The size of the experimental and the control groups is limited to ten students each since the entire sixth grade class has an enrollment of twenty.

Delimitations

The study is restricted to a single upper middle class sixth grade, and any conclusions are not to be extended beyond this population.

Research Procedures

An upper middle class sixth grade consisting of twenty students was divided into two stratified random samples, one of which served as the experimental group, while the other served as the control group. Before the reading aloud sessions began, both groups were given the comprehension section of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (level D, form 1), and the raw scores were recorded.

The experimental group was read to by the researcher for twenty-five minutes three times a week for eight weeks. A variety of stories, poems, and articles were utilized including some classics like O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi," deMaupassant's "The Necklace," and Poe's "The Tell-tale Heart." Contemporary stories and articles found in

newspapers and magazines were also used. Prior to the reading aloud of each selection, the researcher followed the steps of vocabulary development, motivation, and setting purposes for listening, while guided discussion using multi-level questioning followed.

At the same time that the experimental group was read to by the researcher, the control group was monitored by a volunteer, a retired fourth grade teacher, as the students worked on silent reading and a variety of reading skills including vocabulary activities, dictionary skills, and creative writing related to reading.

At the end of the eight week period, both groups were given the comprehension section of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (level D, form 2). The raw scores were compared utilizing a t test to determine if the comprehension of either group had been significantly affected.

Results

The pretest results of the comprehension section of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (level D, form 1) are recorded in Table I below. The mean of the raw scores as well as the Standard deviation and t test applied to the raw scores are shown here.

TABLE I

Pretest Mean, Standard Deviation, and t of Experimental and Control Groups

	M	SD	t
Experimental Group	32.4	5.66	.67
Control Group	32.1	5.37	

As can be seen, there was no significant difference in the raw scores of the experimental and control samples. The samples were equivalent at the outset of this study

Table II shows the posttest results of the comprehension section of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test (level D, Form 2).

TABLE II

Posttest Mean, Standard Deviation, and t of Experimental and Control Groups

	M	SD	t
Experimental Group	37.1	3.18	2.46
Control Group	36.0	4.26	

sig $<$ .01

The t test applied to the raw scores indicates a significant difference between the comprehension score means of the experimental and control groups. The experimental group can be seen to have made a significant gain in comprehension as a result of the experimental treatment. While pretest results suggested that the variation in the samples was similar, posttest standard deviations indicate that the experimental sample is less varied in achievement after the treatment than the control group.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that reading aloud to sixth graders on a regular basis is an effective method of improving reading comprehension. The hypothesis that there would be no significant difference in the comprehension scores of the treatment group is therefore rejected. In fact, this study confirms what researchers including Durkin (1976), Pflaum (1975), and Burns and Row (1980) have suggested -- namely, that developing understanding of what is heard does aid in developing comprehension of what is read.

Although most researchers who have reported success with reading aloud were working with children in the lower grades and very often with children from low socioeconomic and achievement levels (Fearn, 1971; McCormick, 1977; Raftery, 1974), it can be seen that children in sixth grade from an upper middle class community and varying levels of achievement can also benefit from such a practice. If Willems's (1978) observation that reading orally to children often ends entirely by the time they reach fourth grade, then a valid method of modeling language patterns and promoting listening/reading comprehension is being overlooked. Instead of being considered a luxury, it should be part of a complete reading program.

This study spanned a relatively short period, eight weeks. Further research could be done to explore the effects of reading aloud over a longer period of time.

Since much research in this area has focused on younger children, more work could be done with older students including those in junior and senior high school.

Reading to Children and Achievement: Related Research

Important preparation for learning to read takes place in the home. Researchers who have concerned themselves with children's experiences before they enter school have found that children who enter school already able to read and those who learn to read easily in school come from homes where their parents have read to them (Durkin, 1966; Dwyer, 1978). Explanations for the observed relationship between story reading by parents and later reading achievement in school are summarized by Judith Schickedanz (1978):

1. Identification and social learning modeling: If parents read in the presence of their children, their children will try to read also.

2. Direct reinforcement: The attention, physical contact, and praise children receive as they are being read to will help them approach reading situations with positive attitudes.

3. Emotional security and confidence: The positive atmosphere created by parents when they read to their children supports the children's emotional well-being and gives them confidence.

4. Language development: The language learned from the stories read aloud by parents will make it easier for children to read.

5. Book knowledge and knowledge of reading: Children who are read to learn that print is read from left to right, that books have a beginning, middle and end, etc. (pp 48-49).

These explanations blend affect with cognition and suggest an interaction of the two.

The effect of oral reading on linguistic development has also been researched. In a study done by Irwin (1960)

mothers in the experimental group read to their thirteen month-old children daily for at least fifteen minutes from illustrated texts; mothers in the control group did not follow this procedure. The treatment continued until the children were two and a half years old. The results indicated that increasing speech sound stimulation leads to an increase in the phonetic production of young children.

Another study carried out by Chomsky (1972) focused on the relationship between linguistic competence and reading. This researcher investigated the amount and complexity of material read and listened to by a group of children aged six to ten as related to their linguistic stage of development. She concluded that grammatical development goes in an orderly fashion from the simple to the complex for all children, but the age at which each child reaches these stages varies. Chomsky found that factors which facilitate reaching linguistic stages earlier include reading aloud to children, stimulating them to read on their own, and using books for oral reading that have high complexity levels.

In addition to contributing to a positive early reading experience and facilitating linguistic development, reading aloud to children has been shown to affect a child's reading interest and attitudes. Mason and Blanton (1971) worked with three, four, and five-year-old prereaders. The researchers found that once these children learned to read for themselves, they were more eager to read the same books or same types of books that had been read aloud to them than

other books. Mason and Blanton concluded that exposure to a good story increases a child's desire to read it on his own.

Linda and Gary Berg-Cross (1978) also worked with pre-readers, but the purpose of their research was to discover the extent of attitude change that occurs in children as a result of hearing socially relevant stories. The researchers used one hundred and twenty nursery and kindergarten children in the Newark, Delaware area. The children were randomly assigned to one of five experimental or control groups. The children in the experimental groups heard stories selected for their expression of social values concerning friendship, death, risk taking, and sex role stereotyping; those in the control groups heard Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit, selected because it did not have any of the social values of the four experimental stories. Pre and Posttests were administered to the control and experimental groups. The results indicated that the experimental stories made the children's attitudes much more positive. The researchers concluded that the expressed attitudes of four to six-year-old children can be changed by listening to stories espousing different values. Surely, then, both parents and teachers should take time and care in selecting the books they wish to read to children.

In contrast to the research of the Berg-Crosses, Loban (1954), who worked with adolescents, found that there was not an apparent attitude change as a result of reading stories aloud. He did find that careful discussion techniques were necessary if students were to gain any social sensitivity.

Such a conclusion is not surprising because preparation for the story to be read aloud as well as discussion afterward would seem to be part of the listening experience.

Artley (1973) conducted a survey involving approximately one hundred junior and senior education majors. The purpose of the survey was to attempt "to show a positive correlation with pupil achievement and interest" (p. 2). Included in the survey was the following question: "From what you recall, what did your teachers (on any level) do that you feel promoted your competence and interest in reading?" (p. 3) This researcher reports that the greatest number of students replied that the reading aloud to the class or group by their teachers was what they enjoyed the most. The students indicated that this was done on all levels, not merely in the elementary grades. In some instances the teacher read one chapter or episode from a book as a starter, and the students would have to finish the book themselves. In other cases teachers read an entire book chapter by chapter.

Reading aloud appeared as an answer to another question in the survey: "Was there someone or something besides your teachers who contributed to your competence and interest in reading?" (pp. 3-4) By far, the largest number of responses indicated that parents and family were major influences. The majority of students reported that their parents had read to them as children and that a special time had been set aside for this each day.

If reading aloud can have positive effects on beginning readers, can promote language development, and can influence children's attitudes and interests, how is it related to reading achievement, specifically vocabulary development and comprehension? Although reading and listening comprehension are not identical, there are many similarities existing between them. Many researchers including Durkin (1976), Pflaum (1975), and Burns and Roe (1980) suggest that developing understanding of what is heard does aid in developing comprehension of what is read. In order to develop understanding of what is heard, these writers recommend preparing children for listening to a story with many of the same techniques used to prepare them to read -- that is motivating, setting purposes, and the like. Similarly, after the story has been read aloud, a discussion using a hierarchy of questions should take place.

Concerning the manner in which the teacher reads aloud, Lamme (1976) who attempted to create and partially validate an instrument of evaluation found that three factors were most important:

1. Child involvement: Children were asked to predict what would happen next, fill in words and recite chorally.

2. Amount of eye contact: Some teachers were able to look up at their audience frequently.

3. Expression: Teachers who read with expression scored higher than those who read monotonously. (pp. 886-887)

The majority of researchers dealing with the

relationship between reading aloud to children and their reading comprehension and vocabulary development concentrate on children in the early grades, and many of them have been concerned with children from low socioeconomic and low achievement levels. For example, Cohen (1968) used as her sample 285 second grade children from seven elementary schools in New York City designated as Special Service schools because of their academic retardation and low socioeconomic population. Teachers in the experimental group were asked to read a story daily from a special selection provided by the researcher. These teachers were urged to read with expression, were asked to become familiar with the stories before the oral reading, were asked to select suitable follow-up activities from types suggested in a manual that had been provided, and were requested to present the books in order of increasing difficulty, indicated by a number next to each title. This daily story reading took place for an entire academic year in the experimental group, while teachers in the control group used story reading as an occasional treat, if at all. The results of this study indicated that the experimental group showed a significant increase in vocabulary and comprehension over the experimental group. Among the observations of this investigator was the importance of ego involvement and comprehension concepts in the selection of stories to be read aloud because of their role in "stimulating motivation to read while at the same time strengthening language power"

(p. 213). Cohen concluded that reading to children on a regular basis "seems to aid facility in listening, attention span, narrative sense, recall of stretches of verbalization, and the recognition of newly learned words as they appear in other contexts" (p. 217).

Fearn (1971) used 112 fourth graders in two middle class urban schools as his subjects. Each school had an experimental and control group. For twelve weeks, the experimental groups heard taped readings of stories whereas the control groups did not. This investigator reported that although the experimental groups showed improvement in comprehension and total reading on a whole class basis, the treatment was most effective on children at the lower extremes of reading achievement and least effective on children at the upper extremes of reading achievement.

McCormick (1977) makes the generalization that " younger children may benefit from being read to more than older children" (p. 140) and cites Porter (1970) who worked with fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students. In the latter's study reading achievement scores for all students increased significantly after a program of reading aloud, but the scores of the fourth graders were more affected than the scores of the fifth graders or sixth graders.

Still another study was done by Amato, Emans, and Ziegler (1973) to determine the relationship between story-telling and children's reading achievement; this time the setting was not the classroom but rather the library.

The subjects were 298 elementary grade level students. The control group visited the library each week for one and a half hours while the experimental group heard stories at the library. The study spanned two years. Although the researchers could not report any statistically significant results in terms of achievement, they did observe that the experimental group checked out more books and increased its library usage time.

Raftery (1974) is yet another researcher who probed the effects of an oral literature program on reading achievement. Twelve heterogeneously grouped second grade classes participated in the program. There were two categories of literature read aloud to separate groups of students: one was "quality" literature and the other was "regular" literature. The researcher found that the second graders in the group read to from "quality" literature did not make significant gains over the second graders read to from "regular" literature. However, the students who were read aloud to made significant gains in reading achievement over those who were not read to.

Thus research has shown that reading aloud to children on a regular basis can produce several positive results. For prereaders it can make learning to read easier. It can promote linguistic development and affect children's reading interests and attitudes. Reading aloud can also improve reading comprehension and vocabulary development, especially

for younger children and those in low socioeconomic and achievement levels.

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